

Wimbledon 2026: 19 rules, rituals and oddities of the world's most iconic tennis championship

Why do Wimbledon players have to wear all white? What happens to the matches if it rains? Why are Wimbledon tennis balls kept in the fridge? Here is everything you need to know

By Kieron Marchese | 29 June 2026



Jannik Sinner with the winner's trophy after winning his Gentlemen's Singles Final match against Carlos Alcaraz during Wimbledon 2025. Rob Newell - CameraSport/Getty Images

By the end of June, London has usually entered its high-summer performance, with the first serious discussions about Pimm's beginning around about now. Wimbledon 2026, that comes on the heels of a record-breaking heatwave, has pushed those rituals into overdrive, turning the UK's collective focus firmly toward SW19.

The 2026 Championships run from Monday 29 June until Sunday 12 July 2026, returning to the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club for another fortnight of spotless whites, tightly clipped lawns and Centre Court tension. For the practicalities (timings, broadcasts, tickets and how best to follow the action from home) our guide to how to watch this year's tennis championship has you covered.

HOUSE & GARDEN

On court, all eyes will naturally turn to the defending champions Iga Świątek and Jannik Sinner, but Wimbledon has always been about more than the names on the draw. The tournament's enduring charm lies as much in its off-court rituals as its rallies: the discreet who's-who spotting in the Royal Box, the strawberries and cream eaten on the Hill, the almost ceremonial patience of The Queue. And then there are the details that make SW19 feel like its own little world: the all-white dress code, the refrigerated tennis balls, and the grass cut to perfection.

Here are 19 things you need to know about Wimbledon



Catherine, Princess of Wales, attends the award ceremony following the Gentlemen's Singles Final match on day fourteen of 2025 Wimbledon Championships in London. VCG/Getty Images

Why does Catherine, Princess of Wales, present the trophies at Wimbledon?

Every great sporting institution needs its ceremonial anchor, and Wimbledon's is Catherine, Princess of Wales. She's held the patronage since 2016, presenting the trophies at the singles finals when she attends. As Royal Patron of the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, the private members' club behind The Championships, she functions as the tournament's most visible royal presence: part guest of honour, part ceremonial closer, handing the winner's trophy to the champion after two weeks of very polite chaos.

HOUSE & GARDEN

Who is allowed to sit in the Wimbledon Royal Box?

The Royal Box is, as you'd expect, invitation only, with guests chosen by the Chair of the All England Club. The list spans royals, heads of government, former champions, tennis officials, armed forces representatives, and commercial partners, a broad enough orbit that the exclusivity is the point, not the criteria.

Why do Wimbledon players have to wear all white?

Wimbledon's all-white rule dates to Victorian anxieties about visible perspiration. The dress code has been tightening ever since: 'predominantly white' from 1963, 'almost entirely white' by 1995, and by 2014 extended to accessories, undergarments, and even shoe soles, the last of which famously caught Roger Federer out the previous year. The only meaningful loosening came in 2023, when dark undershorts were permitted beneath white skirts to ease anxiety for female players. White still means white, though, not cream, not off-white, not whatever it looked like on the website.

Can players take toilet breaks during a match, and are they monitored?

Yes, but it is not a free-for-all. Grand Slam rules permit a toilet break at a set change, for a reasonable duration, and players can be escorted by an official to the nearest bathroom, which is exactly as procedural as it sounds.

Why do players inspect the tennis balls so carefully before serving?

It's not suspicion or superstition but strategy. Players look for the ball in the best condition: smoother, less fluffed-up balls tend to travel faster through the air, making them useful for a first serve. Fluffier, more worn balls are often knocked back to the ball kids.

Why are Wimbledon tennis balls kept in the fridge?

Wimbledon's Slazenger balls are stored at a controlled 20°C. Not cold, but consistent because temperature affects pressure and bounce. Every ball is also tested for weight, compression and rebound before it gets anywhere near Centre Court.



Iga Swiatek of Poland poses with the trophy during the award ceremony following the Ladies' Singles Final of the 2025 Wimbledon Championships. VCG/Getty Images

How many courts are there at Wimbledon in total?

Wimbledon has 18 grass match courts for The Championships, including Centre Court, No.1 Court and No.2 Court, plus 20 practice courts on site. Across all three venues managed by the All England Club, including the qualifying complex at Roehampton and practice facilities in Raynes Park, the total reaches 88 grass courts. When people ask about 'the Wimbledon courts' though, those 18 Championship grass courts are usually what they mean.

Why is Wimbledon's grass cut so short?

At Wimbledon, even the grass has a specification. The courts are cut to 8mm, a height chosen for modern play and the survival of the grass itself. The Championships' courts use 100% perennial ryegrass, which is hard-wearing enough to cope with two weeks of sliding, sprinting and baseline punishment while still looking, on day one at least, like a lawn from a dream.

Why do men play five sets and women three at Wimbledon?

The simplest answer is tradition, although this is layered with scheduling, history and a long-running debate about equality and endurance. Wimbledon has shown willingness to update

HOUSE & GARDEN

elsewhere. Gentlemen's doubles moved from best of five to best of three in 2023, but the singles split remains one of tennis's more stubborn old structures.

What happens to the matches if it rains at Wimbledon?

On Centre Court and No.1 Court, the roofs can close and play can continue, which is the closest Wimbledon gets to admitting the British weather might be a problem. On the outside courts, play is paused, courts are covered, and everyone waits: players, spectators, broadcasters, strawberries, the lot. The official schedule also makes clear that matches may be delayed by weather.



A view of centre court before The Championships Wimbledon 2026 at All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in London. Matthias Hangst/Getty Images

Why do people traditionally eat strawberries and cream at Wimbledon?

Strawberries and cream have been part of Wimbledon since the Victorian era, when strawberries were a seasonal delicacy available for only a few weeks in June and July, which happened to coincide perfectly with the tournament. The tradition stuck. Today, around 140,000 portions are served across the fortnight: roughly 28,000 kilograms of strawberries and 7,000 litres of cream.

HOUSE & GARDEN

Why is there a pineapple on top of the Wimbledon men's singles trophy?

The honest answer is: nobody can say with total certainty. The most accepted explanation is that the pineapple (a rare fruit at the time) symbolised welcome, hospitality and status in Victorian Britain, a suitably grand flourish for a trophy first presented in the 19th century. It may not have much to do with tennis, but then again, neither do strawberries and cream.

Why is a tennis score called 'love' instead of zero?

This is another one no one knows for certain. The most repeated theory links it to the French *l'oeuf*, egg, because zero resembles one in shape. A second traces it to the Dutch word *lof*, meaning honour, on the basis that a scoreless player is still competing for something.

How do I get tickets for Wimbledon 2026?

The main route is the Public Ballot, though the application window for 2026 has closed. Those without ballot tickets can still try official hospitality, buy legally transferable debenture tickets, or join The Queue for same-day tickets. In other words: there are options, but none that reward leaving it until the kettle has boiled on finals weekend.

Is there a dress code for attending Wimbledon?

For most spectators, there is no strict dress code, except the general atmosphere of Wimbledon, which seems to keep people in check. Smart-casual is the safest bet, especially for hospitality areas, where it is explicitly required. In the Royal Box, the rules are smarter still: suits, jackets and ties are expected, and hats are discouraged if they obstruct the view.



Jannik Sinner with the winner's trophy after winning his Gentlemen's Singles Final match against Carlos Alcaraz during Wimbledon 2025. Rob Newell - CameraSport/Getty Images

What is 'The Queue' at Wimbledon, and how does it work?

The Queue is Wimbledon's same-day ticketing system: part logistics exercise, part national ritual. Fans arrive at Wimbledon Park, collect a numbered Queue Card, and wait, sometimes overnight, for the chance to buy tickets on the day. A limited number of show-court seats are released each morning, including up to 500 for Centre Court on most days, alongside Grounds Passes for the outside courts and The Hill. If you'd like more info, The All England Club publishes an official guide to queuing, naturally.

What should you bring to Wimbledon?

Obviously, bring your mobile ticket, photo ID, a card or contactless payment. Don't forget sun cream, layers, and a reusable water bottle. Pack it all in one bag no larger than 40cm x 30cm x 30cm; anything bigger risks a swift encounter with the rules. Think of it as packing for the airport to go on a holiday during all four seasons, but in a very small bag.

HOUSE & GARDEN

Why are there empty seats at Wimbledon?

Usually, the seats are sold, they are just temporarily empty. People leave for lunch, hospitality, a Pimm's, a wander around the grounds, or simply because they have finished watching the match they came for. Top tip: Wimbledon does run a Ticket Resale Scheme after 3pm, allowing returned show-court tickets to be resold to Grounds Pass holders, with proceeds going to the Wimbledon Foundation; but it relies on ticket-holders actually returning them.

How much prize money do Wimbledon winners get?

For 2026, the total Wimbledon prize money fund is £64.2 million. The ladies' and gentlemen's singles champions will each receive £3.6 million, while the runners-up receive £1.8 million. Even first-round singles players receive £80,000.